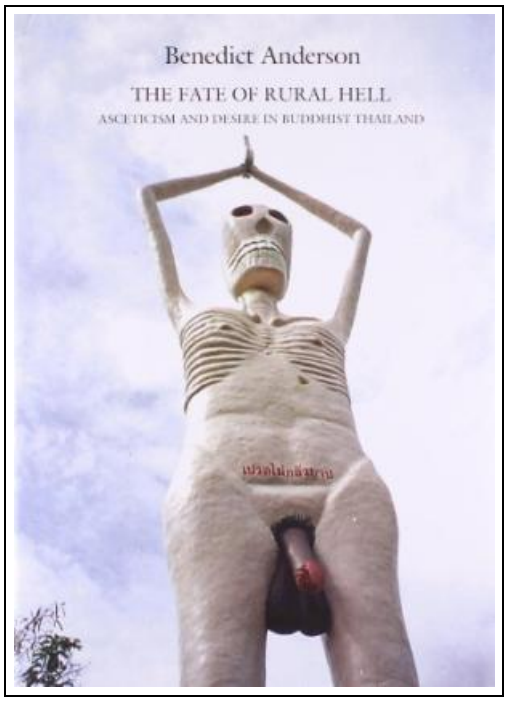
The Fate of Rural Hell



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Reviews

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THE FATE OF RURAL HELL

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Seagull Books London Ltd. Hardback. Book Condition: new. BRAND NEW, The Fate of Rural Hell, Benedict Anderson, In 1975, when political scientist Benedict Anderson reached Wat Phai Rong Wua, a massive temple complex in rural Thailand conceived by Buddhist monk Luang Phor Khom, he felt he had wandered into a demented Disneyland. One of the world's most bizarre tourist attractions, Wat Phai Rong Wua was designed as a cautionary museum of sorts; its gruesome statues depict violent and torturous scenes that showcase what hell may be like. Over the next few decades, Anderson found himself transfixed by this unusual amalgamation of objects, returning several times to see attractions like the largest metal-cast Buddha figure in the world and the Palace of a Hundred Spires. The concrete statuary and perverse art in Luang Phor's personal museum of hell included, side by side, an upright human skeleton in a glass cabinet and a life-size replica of Michelangelo's gigantic nude "David", wearing fashionable red underpants from the top of which poked part of a swollen, un-Florentine penis, alongside dozens of statues of evildoers being ferociously punished in their afterlife. In "The Fate of Rural Hell", Anderson unravels the intrigue of this strange setting, endeavoring to discover what compels so many Thai visitors to travel to this popular spectacle and what order, if any, inspired its creation. At the same time, he notes in Wat Phai Rong Wua the unexpected effects of the gradual advance of capitalism into the far reaches of rural Asia. Both a one-of-a-kind travelogue and a penetrating look at the community that sustains this unlikely tourist destination, "The Fate of Rural Hell" is sure to intrigue and inspire conversation as much as Wat Phai Rong Wua itself.

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